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ABSTRACT

A study examined newsmagazines' visual coverage of the 1988 election to determine if patterns of difference in the visual presentation of candidates existed. A content analysis examined all the visuals (photographs and illustrations) of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates printed in three national weekly newsmagazines--"U.S. News and World Report," "Time," and "Newsweek"--between the Labor Day kickoff and a week after the general election (September 5 to November 21). Every photo containing a candidate's picture was included, and each photo was coded for the candidate, magazine, publication date, size (in picas) and 15 visual attributes. Results indicated that the three newsmagazines displayed no significant differences in how they covered the campaign. Presidential candidates received significantly more coverage than did vice-presidential candidates in all three publications, and Republican candidates were pictured more often than Democrats. The number of pictures differed significantly from one candidate to the other, but the presidential debates had no effect on the number of pictures published by each magazine. George Bush's campaign photos were significantly larger than those of Michael Dukakis. Bush received better page position; he appeared more cheerful in his visuals; and he received better camera angles than did Dukakis. In the vice-presidential campaign, Lloyd Bentsen's visuals were virtually absent from the coverage. (Six tables of data are included.) (KEH)

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Magazine Division

NEWSMAGAZINE VISUALS AND THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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NEWSMAGAZINE VISUALS
AND THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

In recent years presidential elections have been monitored by scholars and research organizations to determine if there is any trace of bias in the coverage of the campaign by the press. Using assertion analysis Westley, et. al., investigated statements from the 1960 election and found partisan patterns in the way newsmagazines covered the candidates.[1]

Stempel found that George Wallace was clearly treated as a minor candidate in the 1968 election, receiving slightly more than half as much space as either of his opponents.[2] Evarts and Stempel, however, found no identifiable bias in the coverage of the 1972 election by the networks, newsmagazines, and major newspapers.[3]

Bias, or preferential treatment, can be evaluated in a number of ways. Some studies look at the amount of space allocated to each candidate, others consider treatment such as position on the page. Some have attempted to code negative, positive, and neutral content.

More recently, the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan study group, evaluated network broadcast coverage of candidates during the primaries in the 1988 election. This study looked at positive or negative statements relating to character, job performance, campaign performance, and issue stands and found that the tone of the coverage was generally positive before the New Hampshire primary and turned negative after that point. The study found that Robertson suffered the most, while Jackson suffered the least from negative coverage.[4]

Visual Communication. One area of particular interest is the impact of visual communication in the highly image-oriented political arena. Is there any partisanship apparent in the way visuals are used to chronicle the campaign and depict the candidates?

This question was investigated for the first time in a study of newsmagazine photographs during the 1984 campaign.[5] That study found that President Reagan, the incumbent, received significantly more favorable play in visuals than did the challenger, Walter Mondale. In terms of sheer quantity, Reagan photos outnumbered Mondale photos significantly. While Reagan was presented more favorably early in the campaign, this was reversed by the end of the campaign.

Likewise, early in the campaign Bush was presented more favorably as a vice-presidential candidate than was Ferraro; however, that changed as Ferraro overtook Bush later in the campaign. Ferraro photos significantly outnumbered Bush photos. For both presidential and vice-presidential races, the democratic candidates received more favorable treatment at the end, possibly a reflection of the underdog or come-from-behind position of the candidates. The data, however, indicate that overall the candidates were differentially represented in the newsmagazines' visuals during the 1984 campaign.

While image is partially under control of the candidate in terms of self-presentation, the "re-presentation" of the image can be manipulated by the medium. Editorial decisions about which pictures to use--considering all the varieties of expression, gestures, setting, interaction, camera angle, and posture--can affect how a candidate's image is presented and perceived. This treatment can reflect whether the candidate is treated "presidentially" or not seriously. The "play" of the visual also affects reader perception. Are both candidates given equivalent amounts of space and position, or does one receive more emphasis?

Visual treatment is an important aspect of the gatekeeper function. An agenda-setting experiment by Wanta found that the size of photos in newspapers can have an immediate influence on readers. The study found

that editors "have the power to raise their reader's salience on certain issues over a short period of time by merely increasing the size of photographs."[6]

If there is a differential treatment of an important element like visuals, can this affect readers perceptions of and preferences for the candidates? This study will look at newsmagazines' visual coverage of the 1988 election to determine if the patterns of difference in visual presentation continue to appear.

METHOD

This content analysis generally replicated the previous study of newsmagazine photographs. It examined all the visuals, this time both photographs and illustrations, of the 1988 presidential and vice-presidential candidates printed in the three national weekly newsmagazines--U.S. News & World Report, Time, and Newsweek--between the labor day kickoff and a week after the general election (September 5 to November 21).

Every photo containing a candidate picture was included in the study including those on the cover and the contents page. Those photographs containing the candidates were coded twice--once for each candidate--and treated as two separate photographs in the analysis.

Coding Procedure. Each photo was coded for the candidate, magazine, publication date, size (in picas) and 15 visual attributes. The visual attributes were evaluated on a rating scale from the most favorable presentation (rated +1) to the least favorable presentation (rated -1). (NOTE: For ease of tabulation and analysis, these values were changed to 3, 2, and 1).

For example, on the candidate activity attribute, dynamic behavior such as speaking, shaking hands, and kissing babies was rated more favorable (+1) while lethargic or passive activity such as listening, reading, and dozing were rated as less favorable (-1).

For the posture attribute, standing tall and upright was rated more favorable while bowed, slumped, or leaning on something was rated as less favorable. For the remaining attributes, the verbal labels were as follows: arms, more favorable was arms headhigh or above, less favorable was arms at side, at rest, or folded; hands, more favorable was hands gesturing or doing something, less favorable was hands at side, or at rest; eyes, more favorable was eyes looking directly at camera or at someone, less favorable was eyes not direct--up, down, or closed; expression on face, more favorable was cheerful or confident, less favorable was unhappy, worried, or tired; interaction, more favorable was cheering crowd or attentive colleagues, less favorable was candidate alone or with inattentive crowd or colleagues; camera angle, more favorable was looking up at candidate, less favorable was looking down on candidate; portrayal, more favorable was an attempt to present the candidate as dignified, serious, or presidential, less favorable was a presentation that made fun of the candidate giving a comic or goofy treatment; position, top of the page was favorable, less favorable was bottom of the page; size, more favorable was larger than 1/2 page, less favorable was smaller than 1/2 page.

Another set of image attributes were also evaluated. Props were noted as either campaign symbols like flags, bunting and the presidential seal or knowledge symbols like charts, graphs, briefcases, military or workplace apparel and gear. The setting was noted as being either monumental and formal or informal and casual. Dress was noted as either dignified suit and tie or sport, casual clothes, or shirtsleeves, no tie. Family association was coded as either with family, with spouse, or no family.

Index Construction. Three indices were constructed from the sets of variables. The "behavior" index was a total of activity, posture, arms, hands, eyes, and expression. The "context" index included props, setting, dress, and

interaction with colleagues and family. The "perspective" index included the position, size, camera angle, and portrayal.

Presidential and vice-presidential attributes were tested by means of two-tailed T-Tests, and ANOVA techniques were used to determine if the candidates, newsmagazines, or the time period in the campaign interacted with the size of the pictures published by the newsmagazines.

Intercoder Reliability. The two principal researchers double-coded the November 21 issue of Newsweek in order to develop an estimate of intercoder reliability. The Holsti method gave a coefficient of reliability of 84% for the 28 photos (or 448 judgements) evaluated in the test magazine.[7] Application of Scott's pi resulted in an agreement coefficient of .76.[8]

FINDINGS

Number of Visuals. There were differences in the number of visuals by candidate and by party; however, the pattern of newsmagazine coverage for the four candidates did not vary significantly (see Table 1).

From a party standpoint, republican candidates accounted for 164 visuals, while democrats accounted for 120 visuals, and the difference in visuals between the two parties was significant ($X^2 = 6.82$, df=1, $p<.01$).

Overall, the four candidates appeared in 284 visuals during the test period. George Bush appeared in 125 visuals; Dukakis, 107; Quayle, 39; and Bentsen, 13. The differences between all four of these totals varied significantly from what would have been a chance distribution of photos ($X^2 = 121.12$, df=3, $p<.01$) with the result that both presidential candidates appeared in significantly more photos than might have occurred by chance, while the vice-presidential candidates appeared in significantly less photos.

Time magazine published 108 visuals; Newsweek, 96; and U.S. News carried 80; but the differences between the newsmagazines was not significant ($X^2 = 4.16$, df=2, $p>.05$).

Besides analyzing the number of candidate photos in each newsmagazine, a crosstabulation was conducted to test the pattern of coverage among the three newsmagazines during the test period. In the presidential race George Bush was in 44% of the visuals published by all three newsmagazines, which was more than Michael Dukakis who appeared in 37%. In the vice-presidential race Dan Quayle was in 14% of the visuals, and Lloyd Bentsen appeared in a mere 5%.

Of the 284 total, 38% appeared in Time, 34% appeared in U.S. News & World Report, and 28% appeared in Newsweek. Crosstabulation statistics did not reveal significance in the pattern of coverage among the candidates provided by the newsmagazines (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: Number of Candidate Appearances Crosstabulated by Newsmagazine

	Time		U.S. News		Newsweek		Total/Ave	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Presidential Candidates:								
Bush	48	38	42	34	35	28	125	44
Dukakis	44	41	34	32	29	27	107	38
Vice-Presidential Candidates:								
Quayle	11	28	16	41	12	31	39	14
Bentsen	5	39	4	31	4	31	13	5
Totals/Average	108	38	96	34	80	28	284	100

$X^2 = 2.202$, df=6, $p>.05$

To evaluate the impact of the presidential debates, newsmagazines' publication schedules were broken into three time periods to test if editors' visual selections might have been influenced by the debate performances of the candidates. The first time period (Time 1) included issues from Sept. 5 to

Sept. 26; Time 2: October 3 to October 24; and Time 3: October 31 to November 21. As Table 2 illustrates, a significant difference did occur. However, more examination of the findings uncovered that the significance in the crosstab was contributed by the differences in number of candidate visuals, rather than by the differences in the number of visuals published by the newsmagazines during the three stages of the campaign (X^2 = 2.72, df=2, p>.05).

TABLE 2: Candidate Visuals Crosstabulated by Three Time Periods

	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3		TOTALS	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Presidential Candidates:								
Bush	41	14	33	12	51	18	125	44
Dukakis	29	10	36	13	42	15	107	38
Vice-Presidential Candidates:								
Quayle	21	7	10	4	8	3	39	14
Bentsen	1	.4	9	3	3	1	13	5
TOTALS	92	32	88	31	104	37	284	100*

X^2 = 20.72, df=6, p<.01

*Because of rounding error, totals might not add up to 100

One interesting observation, however, was that only one picture of Bentsen appeared before the vice-presidential debate, while nine appeared the two weeks immediately following the vice-presidential debate. During the last time period, only three Bentsen visuals appeared, and those appeared in the campaign wrapup issue.

Size. An evaluation of the mean picas of coverage received by the candidates showed statistically significant differences. Analysis of variance was used for two different tests. In the first test, the size of the picture was the dependent variable, while candidates and the three newsmagazines were the independent variables. Findings indicate that significance in the model

was contributed only by the candidates, and no interactions were evident (See Table 3).

TABLE 3: An Analysis of Mean Picture Size by Candidate and Newsmagazine.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
Main Effects	6422511	5	1284502.11	3.659	.003**
Candidates	4957449	3	1652483.13	4.708	.003**
Publication	1466949	2	733474.31	2.090	.126
Interactions	1820995	6	303499.21	.865	.521
Candidate/Pub	1820995	6	303499.21	.865	.521
Explained	8243506	11	749409.62	2.135	.018
Residual	95474124	272	351007.81		
TOTAL	103717630	283	366493.3		

**p<.01

Using the Scheffe test[9] to analyze the significant F score provided by the candidates, one significant difference was found in the size of the photos used for Bush and Dukakis. The Bush visuals were significantly larger (Mean difference = 237.3, S = 217.923, p< .05). Knowledge of publication was not a factor in the test.

In the second ANOVA test, photo size was the dependent variable and the independent variables were candidates and the three constructed time periods Results from the second test (see Table 4) were similar to the first as the candidate dimension contributed the only significant F in the model. Use of the Scheffe test again revealed that Bush visuals were significantly larger than those of Dukakis (Mean difference = 237.3, S = 215.67, p<.05). Knowledge of time periods was not a factor in the test.

TABLE 4: An Analysis of Mean Picture Size by Candidate and Time Period.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
Main Effects	6879060	5	1375812.006	3.971	.002
Candidates	4415747	3	1471915.603	4.249	.006
Time Periods	1923498	2	961749.054	2.776	.064
Interactions	2609125	6	434854.185	1.255	.278
Cand/Time	2609125	6	434854.185	1.255	.278
Explained	9488185	11	862562.285	2.490	.005
Residual	94229445	272	346431.782		
TOTAL	103717630	283	366493.392		

T-Tests. On the individual variables, three significant differences were found in the 15 comparisons between the two presidential candidates (see Table 5). On facial expression, Bush was presented more often with a cheerful, confident look ($t=3.87$, $df=225$, $p<.01$). Also Bush was presented more often than Dukakis in half page or larger visuals ($t=3.00$, $df=204$, $p<.01$). The camera angle for Bush more often looked up to the candidate ($t=2.16$, $df=227$, $p<.05$).

The difference in size and camera angle was reflected in the significant difference for the perspective index ($t=2.62$, $df=227$, $p<.01$) which showed Bush visuals being treated more favorably than the Dukakis visuals. The other two indices--behavior and context--did not provide any significant differences between the two candidates.

Only one difference was statistically significant in the comparisons between the vice presidential candidates. Bentsen was more likely to be presented as the center of attention while Quayle was more frequently pre-

sented with a crowd or colleagues paying attention to something or someone else.

TABLE 5: T-Test Comparisons of Candidate Visual Attributes

	Bush n=125	Dukakis n=107	Quayle n=39	Bentsen n=13
BEHAVIOR				
Activity	2.53	2.65	2.54	2.54
Posture	2.70	2.60	2.59	2.77
Arms	2.14	2.12	1.97	2.00
Hands	2.52	2.56	2.33	2.31
Eyes	2.30	2.36	2.41	2.38
Expression	2.41	2.15**	2.44	2.46
TOTAL	14.48	14.43	14.28	14.46
CONTEXT				
Props	1.99	1.96	2.05	2.23
Setting	1.78	1.84	1.90	1.85
Dress	2.62	2.44	2.51	2.69
Interaction	2.01	2.08	1.95	2.46**
Family	1.98	1.94	2.03	2.00
TOTAL	10.38	10.29	10.44	11.23
PERSPECTIVE				
Position	2.18	2.06	2.46	2.38
Size	1.33	1.11**	1.03	1.00
Camera Angle	2.18	2.03*	2.13	1.92
Portrayal	2.02	1.99	1.97	2.23
TOTAL	7.71	7.20**	7.59	7.54

**$p < .01$
*$p < .05$

There was one other difference which was apparent in the content analysis but masked by the statistical tests (because of small cell size) and that occurred in the presentation of family association. Quayle was often depicted with family or spouse, while Bentsen seldom was. Mrs. Bentsen and

the Bentsen family were the missing persons in the 1988 presidential campaign. This is better depicted in Table 6.

TABLE 6: Candidates and Family Interaction

	With Spouse	Alone/With Colleagues	With Family
Bush	8	112	5
Dukakis	7	99	1
Quayle	4	30	5
Bentsen	1	12	0

In summary, the three newsmagazines displayed no differences in how they covered the campaign. Presidential candidates received significantly more coverage than did vice-presidential candidates in all three publications, and Republican candidates were pictured more often than Democrats. The number of pictures for each candidate differed significantly from each other, but the presidential debates did not have any effect on the number of pictures published by each publication.

George Bush's campaign photos were significantly larger than those of Michael Dukakis. Larger Bush photos appeared in all three publications, and the size of those photos was not influenced by the three stages of the presidential campaign. Bush received better page position; he appeared more cheerful in his visuals; and he received better camera angles than did Michael Dukakis. In the vice-presidential campaign, Lloyd Bentsen visuals were virtually absent from the coverage.

CONCLUSIONS

In general the newsmagazines tried to provide balanced visual coverage of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 1988 campaign. In doing this content analysis, it was apparent that the editors were trying to match visuals as much as possible, even pairing them in many layouts.

It is true, however, that the Republican candidates, who were also the winners, did receive larger play. Bush appeared in more visuals and the visuals were larger than those used for Dukakis. Furthermore, Bush was depicted as more cheerful and confident than Dukakis and seemed to benefit from a more respectful camera angle. This Bush advantage carried throughout the 1988 campaign, which was much different from the way both his and Ronald Reagan's visual portrayal fluctuated in the 1984 campaign.

Vice presidential coverage in 1988 was in sharp contrast to coverage in 1984. The interest that Geraldine Ferraro generated as the first woman to seek the vice presidential nod was mirrored in 1984 coverage as she was portrayed more positively and in more photos than George Bush by the end of the campaign. In 1988, newsmagazines did not seem interested in the vice-presidential campaign since they significantly underplayed both candidates. Quayle, who some seemed to think was being kept away from the cameras, did receive more coverage than Bentsen. The shots, however, were more likely to depict scenes where Quayle was an observer rather than the center of attention.

Bentsen went virtually unnoticed by the newsmagazines, and while probably underused by his party, he received very little coverage until the vice-presidential debate. This also was reflected in the strange pattern of coverage that eliminated Mrs. Bentsen and the Bentsen family from newsmagazine pages. All of the other candidates were depicted at various

times with family and wives, except for Bentsen. Although the selection of Bentsen as a running mate was considered by many to have been a good Dukakis choice, it was obvious that the newsmagazines did not see it the same way.

While on the surface there seemed to be an effort made by the newsmagazines to provide balanced coverage, and there were few differences on most of the 15 dimensions evaluated, there is still evidence that one candidate, in this case Vice President Bush, received more and larger visuals as well as more favorable placement. Bush's advantage was subtle, and it was an advantage that was carried by all three newsmagazines. It was in place at the beginning of the campaign, and it did not waver throughout the three stages of the campaign. In this respect, there was evidence of a differential pattern of coverage apparent in the visuals used in newsmagazines in the 1988 campaign.

FOOTNOTES

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